

Introduction

Hello, my name is Helen Watson and I'm a Methodist Local Preacher in the Berkshire and Hampshire Borders Circuit. I hope you had a peaceful Christmas, and that you have a very Happy New year.

Call to Worship

Let all parts of creation – animals, trees, rulers, young and old – unite in worship. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted, his glory is above heaven and earth.

Hymn STF188 There's a light upon the mountain and the day is at the spring

1 There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring,
when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King ;
weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long ;
but his triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

2 There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air ;
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer :
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.

Henry Burton (1840–1930)

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Prayer³ and Lords Prayer

Lord God,
you are the giver of all that is good and just and right,
you give beyond measure.
You are the giver of a gift beyond the value of gold,
beyond the potency of any frankincense,
beyond the cleansing of any myrrh,
beyond life and death.
Thanks and praise be to you.

We give you thanks that each life is special and precious in your sight.
We give you thanks for those who have offered us care in times of need, comfort in times of loss, attention when we felt neglected.
Help us, as your treasured children, to pay that giving and care forwards.
Open our eyes to those who are suffering and grieving at this time.
We thank you for the solace of your presence and ask that we may share it with those who

3 He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way ;
he is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day :
but his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above ;
for the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.

4 Hark ! We hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell ;
'tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel :
Zion, go now forth to meet him ; and, my soul, be swift to bring
all your finest and your noblest for the triumph of our King !

need it most.

In the light of Christmas,
in the light of the gift of Christ Jesus our Lord,
in the light of all this goodness and joy,
we want to cast off our failings:
our failure to stand with others in their weeping and sorrow,
our turning away from the pain of others,
our cowardice in the face of injustice and violence
that affects the weakest and poorest the most.
Forgive us, Lord, and change our hearts.

SILENCE

God assures us that our wrongs are wiped away, our sins forgiven, our slate wiped clean.
With the gift of forgiveness, let us live in the light.

Amen.

We say together the Lord's prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.
For ever and ever.

Amen.

This reading describes events after the Three Wise Men had come to bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus and had left to travel home.

Reading Matthew 2: 13 - 21¹

When the Wise Men had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him. "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him."

Joseph got up. During the night, he left for Egypt with the child and his mother Mary. Herod realized that the Wise Men had tricked him. So he became very angry. He gave orders concerning Bethlehem and the area around it. All the boys two years old and under were to be killed. This agreed with the time when the Wise Men had seen the star.

In this way, the words the prophet Jeremiah spoke came true. He had said, "A voice is heard in Ramah. It's the sound of crying and deep sadness. Rachel is crying over her children. She refuses to be comforted, because they are gone." (Jeremiah 31:15)

After Herod died, Joseph had a dream while he was still in Egypt. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him.

The angel said, "Get up! Take the child and his mother. Go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead."

So Joseph got up. He took the child and his mother Mary back to the land of Israel

Reflection

I have three children, quite close together. So, as you can imagine, when they were very small, I was very busy. Christmas was no different. We lived in a small town and when Santa came to the local hall just before Christmas one year, we went to see him. When we arrived, the hall was chaotic. Children rushing round, parents trying to keep order, parcels and bags everywhere. I was just about to take my kids away when I looked down at my son, who would have been 2 or 3. His eyes were wide and he was looking at Santa with awe and wonder. To him, it must have been a magical moment. I stopped rushing and stood quietly with him, enjoying the time of wonder.

Life is a mixture of rush and of peace, of anxiety and love, of tragedy and joy. We can't escape from that.

One moment we have great joy and happiness, and the next great sadness and maybe even tragedy.

That's the world that Jesus came into. As a small baby. We hear of the joy of his birth, the adoration of the shepherds and Wise Men, and then suddenly we're in the middle of a massacre of children by a jealous king.

The abuse of power suddenly comes into play and Jesus and his family have to escape to Egypt until the danger has passed.

Life is wonderful but fragile. Children are vulnerable and fragile. In fact, we are all vulnerable and fragile no matter what age we are.

Jesus's response is compassion and caring. His love for us and for everyone is always there. He came to protect and preserve life. He is the gift of love, protection and healing for us and for others through all the chaos and the joy. Perhaps we can remember that as we move into a new year that his gift of love is there for each and every one of us.

Amen

Hymn STF205

It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old

<p>1 It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old, from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold : 'Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all-gracious King !' The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.</p>	<p>3 Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long ; beneath the angel strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong ; and man, at war with man, hears not the love-song which they bring. O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing !</p>
<p>2 Still through the cloven skies they come, with peaceful wings unfurled ; and still their heavenly music floats o'er all the weary world ; above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hovering wing ; and ever o'er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.</p>	<p>4 For lo, the days are hastening on, to prophets shown of old, when with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold, when the new heaven and earth shall own, the Prince of Peace their King, and all the world repeat the song which now the angels sing.</p>

Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810–1876)

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Prayers of Intercession³

Lord, we pray for all those affected by tyranny,
the children who are victims of someone else's war,
someone else's prejudice, someone else's cruelty.
We grieve over the violence in our world
and the suffering of the innocent.

We ask for your help, Lord, you who have also suffered,
you who see far more than we ever can,
right into the deepest darkness.

Lord, we lift the grieving, the despairing,
the casualties of humanity's horrors,
and plead their cause to you today.

We pray for the children stolen and given weapons to bear;
for those enslaved, violated, abused.

We pray for the mothers and fathers who could not save their children,
whose lives are a lament over what they have lost.

We lift to you, Lord, those who are no longer children.
Those for whom life is difficult, cruel or filled with pain.
We ask for your healing and for your comfort.

O God of love, hear us,
O God of light, vanquish the darkness.
Come, our great rescuer, and make your presence known.

Everyone is now invited, if you can, to hold out your hands, palms up, as if they're gently cradling something precious.

Now imagine someone vulnerable — a child, an elderly neighbour, someone lonely, or grieving in your hands. Ask God to help you hold them with care, in prayer and in action.

SILENCE

God of gentleness, show us how to hold others with tenderness. May our care be your care. And accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

Hymn STF224 As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold

1	As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold, as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright, so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to thee.	pure, and free from sin's alloy, all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.
2	As with joyful steps they sped, Saviour, to thy lowly bed, there to bend the knee before thee, whom heaven and earth adore, so may we with willing feet ever seek thy mercy-seat.	4 Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way ; and, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glory hide.
3	As they offered gifts most rare at thy cradle rude and bare, so may we with holy joy,	5 In the heavenly country bright need they no created light ; thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down ; there for ever may we sing alleluias to our King.

William Chatterton Dix (1837–1898)

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Blessing

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and those we love and remain with us forever.

Amen

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